



THE STUDY OF THEOSOPHY

(A LETTER)

FROM THE THEOSOPHIC
MESSENGER

—BY—

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(*A Letter*)

You ask me what books I advise you to read on Theosophy. The answer is not so easy to give as one might imagine. Having known of Theosophy and the literature devoted to it during the last twenty-two years presumably I ought to be able to tell you at once what to read; but it is just because I have studied Theosophy so long that I must think well before I answer.

What a person recommends you to read will depend on what is his conception of Theosophy. Theosophy is on the one hand a science of facts, and on the other it is a philosophy of action. To me, though the former is intensely fascinating, it is the latter phase of Theosophy that is ever prominent. Why that is I shall try

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to show, though it means somewhat personal explanations.

It has been my privilege to have been brought into close association with the leaders of the theosophical movement. Madame Blavatsky I saw only three or four times, and I was then a boy; of Colonel Olcott I saw more. Mr. W. Q. Judge also I met once or twice. Mr. A. P. Sinnett I got to know well, as for a year after my going to England as a boy I lived at his house. But it is specially with Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater I was brought into closest contact. For some four years I lived at the London Headquarters which was then Mrs. Besant's home; for over eleven years I was with Mr. Leadbeater, and owe to him all I have gained from a western education.

Now what was most striking to me among those prominent theosophists, and in Mr. Leadbeater with whom I

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was most intimately associated, was their devotion to a great ideal of altruistic effort. Always in their minds noble work for mankind was the first thought, and even as a boy I could not help being strongly impressed with the idea that the real theosophist is one who forgets his personal griefs and disappointments and hopes in a living and powerful enthusiasm for human welfare. Day in and day out, from morning to night and night to morning, this was the undertone sounding throughout all their activities; it might be that they were going for a walk or were reading a novel for relaxation, and still at the back of their mind was the thought of a work that was to be resumed, the one work which it was important should be done. I have been with Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater when they were exercising wonderful gifts of psychic develop-

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ment, using faculties that gave them tremendous power over men's affairs; yet as they wielded these powers it was always with an utter absence of self-consciousness or pride, showing that psychic growth and power, as an aim in life, never formed any part of their philosophy of life.

Far more noteworthy than all this, to me as an observer, was the fact that their unselfish devotion to human welfare was inspired by the thought that all their work was but the carrying out of the plans of the Masters. The Guardians of Humanity, the Elder Brothers of the Race, the Masters of the Wisdom, were not to them logical necessities, speculations or even mere ideals. They were Realities, the most tremendous Realities indeed in their lives. These theosophists that I was brought up with quickly showed me that I was to look to no one among mere mortals

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for help and comfort; my aim in life should be *first* to seek the Master, for it was He alone that would understand what I meant to do and to be, when all the rest of the world might misjudge and condemn. For one who was striving to live an ideal life the path was bound to be strewn more with thorns than with roses; but whatever the ups and downs of life might be, if only he would train his life, dedicating his best endeavors in the name of the Master and hoping some day to know Him as Father to Son, as Friend to friend, then there could be no condition of misery or despair in life where the Master would not always be present to comfort and strengthen. That I must never forget that all that was best in me was not for myself but for the Master, to be used by Him according to His plans for human welfare—this was the philosophy of action that became

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to me the more important phase of Theosophy.

To you life is just opening its doors. You have not finished high school yet, and I hope your past karma has in store for you happy circumstances. Happily for you, you are already interested in Theosophy, and I know of no greater advantage than to start life knowing something of Theosophy. It is like a sailor having a mariner's compass, which will always tell him where is the magnetic north. What I have said above will show you that to me in Theosophy the magnetic north is a life to live.

What I desire you to get first from Theosophy is a clear idea of what you must do towards your neighbor. It is here that you should take as your Ten Commandments what the Master K. H. says in Alcyone's book *At the Feet of the Master*. There is the

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theosophic life, and if you do not heartily respond to its ideals, no amount of mere book learning of Theosophy will lead you any considerable distance. You must as soon as possible orient your life; that little book will tell you how.

Note that the ideal the Master outlines is not gloomy or saddening; it does not call on you to put aside the lovely things of life and be all the time serious and long-faced. You will find that it does call on you to eliminate from your life the wasteful and injurious element; it is a call to you as a soul to bring the life of the soul down here to earth. And you can do that as you live your life among your companions, surrounded by innocent pleasures and beautiful friendships. But there must always be throughout your life a high seriousness, that forceful quality the Greeks were conscious of even in their ath-

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letic games. Emerson says somewhere that "a great boy or girl, with good sense, is a Greek." It is that "good sense" you can bring to the activities in life as you study Theosophy.

But the ability you have to live usefully and truly depends much on your understanding of the facts round you. As I mentioned in the beginning, Theosophy is a science of facts; it marshals the facts gathered in every realm of science, religion, art, literature, philosophy, and history and shows them all in a coherent order as parts of a great divine Plan. A correct vision of the plan is not merely fascinating; it inspires to highest conduct. The more I study nature in all her manifestations visible and invisible, the more I can forget myself and my petty affairs; the magnificent scheme that evolution is, as shown by Theosophy, makes me

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understand what the Buddha meant when He said: "Do not complain and cry and pray, but open your eyes and see. The light is all about you, if you would only cast the bandage from your eyes and look. It is so wonderful, so beautiful, so far beyond what any man has dreamt of or prayed for, and it is for ever and ever."

To make another see the Great Scheme—that is a task that only Adepts are expert in! Still, lesser people, our theosophical writers, have done and are doing their best, and their writings to-day form a great literature. Now people, as they approach Theosophy, are of two main types; there is one type whose natural bent of mind is first to seek a general outline of things, who readily see principles, and later will fill in details; there is another type who prefer to follow up one topic in life in

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detail, see its ramifications into other topics and so later get a general idea of the relation all bear in one harmonious whole. The former desire as it were to get a bird's-eye view of things first; the latter desire to see the illumination of one corner of life in the light of Theosophy and the general survey of evolution does not at first fascinate them. To the former of course one recommends an introductory work like Mr. Leadbeater's *Outline of Theosophy* or our little *Primer*, or Mrs. Besant's *Popular Lectures*; and then the inquirer can be offered *The Ancient Wisdom* of Mrs. Besant, and Sinnett's *Growth of the Soul*. But to inquirers who do not care for the bird's-eye view, one would recommend such a work as *Some Problems of Life*, and *Theosophy and the New Psychology*, or *The Changing World*. If the person were specially interested in the

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Christian religion then of course Mrs. Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* would be at once suggested as an introduction to Theosophy.

I presume your school studies have trained your mind to take to some degree a general survey of a subject; I hope they have taught you when reading a book to quickly grasp the main principles in the author's mind. One of the advantages of training in a good university is acquiring this ability and if you have it you will find theosophic study easy. Read first *An Outline of Theosophy*. You will get from it a general idea; then side by side with that read *In the Outer Court*. You should here read too one of the most beautiful books in our literature, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*. It is a story, but in its main outlines describes events in one of the past lives of the Master Hil-arion; you may find in it, as some

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have, much inspiration for carving out your own path to the Light.

Next you might read *The Inner Life* of Mr. Leadbeater and by this time you should be ready for Mrs. Besant's *The Ancient Wisdom*. You certainly will not understand it all the first time, nor the tenth time; but it will broaden your intellectual horizon. In reading a work like *The Ancient Wisdom* the first or second time, if you will aim to get merely the general outline of cosmic evolution, you will probably find it more profitable than to try to understand every link in the chain.

If as you have progressed thus far in your theosophical studies you have shown the proper spirit of helpfulness in your daily life, then you may be given the opportunity of joining the band of Invisible Helpers who work on the astral plane at night under the direction of the pupils of

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the Masters; but to be useful in that work you must possess a clear knowledge of life on the astral plane and what awaits men after death. Here our chief authority is Mr. Leadbeater and you cannot do better than to familiarize yourself with his *Invisible Helpers* and *The Other Side of Death*. You will now find it helpful to read Mrs. Besant's *Some Problems of Life*, and *Dreams*, by Mr. Leadbeater; and the two illustrated works on *Man, Visible and Invisible* and *Thought Forms* will tell you something of the possibilities of psychic vision, though I hope you will not be led off into that by-path of psychism which makes many people lop-sided and useless. By the time you have read these works, you will I think be able to swim for yourself in the ocean of Theosophy, and will by then know what specific line of study—religious, ethical or scientific—attracts you most in Theosophy.

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In conclusion, let me point out to you that Theosophy is not to be found only in books; it is the science of Life, and life is everywhere. All that you find, outside the modern theosophical literature, in science and in art, is also Theosophy; wherever is a fact, remember that is a part of the great scheme. As you read science text-books at school, remember that there too is something of Theosophy, the science of facts; as you read poetry (and I hope you will read the best only and often of that) remember again that poets enable you to understand men's hearts, and that that is one phase of Theosophy. Seek Theosophy in the exquisite productions of the masters of art in Greece, in the middle ages in Europe, and in the few to-day; above all train yourselves to *feel* Theosophy in the woods and fields and in the play of light and shadow in the clouds. Worship, as

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you worship none else but the Master and the Light, all great music; for of all the exposition of the Divine Wisdom to men the most perfect is that through music. You like music now, and you can play; purify your musical taste by always refusing to play any but the best music, and you will find the inevitable reaction within you so that you can choose without difficulty the best everywhere in life. The theosophist's conception of life may best be described as musical (what I mean by this you will understand some day as you read Plato), and music will bring you very near to Theosophy.

Much awaits you in life, and I hope that there will be far more sunshine than shadow; but with Theosophy to guide you, you will ever have a mariner's compass giving you the magnetic north to life—self-forgetfulness in an enthusiasm for the work of the

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Master for men. Whatsoever your karma brings you, remember those words of the Lady of the Lotus to the boy Sensa in *The Idyll of the White Lotus*: "Keep in the sunlight, dear child, and let not the phantoms delude thee; for there is a life of lives awaiting thee and the pure flower of knowledge and love is ready for thee to pluck." So shall you come to the feet of the Master, in Whom you will find in full glory all that you hope to be some day.

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